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Control of lake chemicals urged

Chicago Daily News

U.S. and Canadian experts today recommended a crash program to control the use of organic chemicals contaminating fish in the Great Lakes.

They singled out potential health hazards from high levels of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) found in the fish of Lake Michigan.

PCB is an industrial compound widely used as a retardant in closed electrical systems.

The PCB problem was spotlighted in the third annual report of the two-nation Great Lakes Water Quality Board.

Far-reaching new water quality goals were recommended in the Great Lakes fish. Currently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a limit of five parts per million in PCB in fish shipped interstate for human consumption. This is 50 times higher than the level concentration recommended today by the U.S.-Canadian group which says the levels should not exceed .1 parts per million.

The two-nation board urged "a co-ordinated program for use control of persistent organic contamination, particularly PCB." It said the new program should begin "at the earliest possible date."

In a 165-page report, the board reported that DDT levels continue to decline in Lake Michigan fish, But it said that PCB concentrations "show no evidence of a downward trend" and are well above the FDA tolerance level. The board said the figures "raise concern for human health implications" and fish reproduction.

Last month, the Michigan Natural Resources Commission proposed a state and national ban on the industrial chemical. A four-state Lake Michigan Toxic Substance Committee recently recommended a ban on PCB except for "essential uses."

The Great Lakes Water Quality Board report also:

—Listed many "problem areas" not meeting water quality goals established by the two nations in a 1972 agreement.

—Urged an end to the disposal in open lake waters of polluted material dredged from harbors and ship channels.

—Proposed a $23.7 million surveillance program to monitor water pollution.

—Reported that earlier estimates of phosphorus entering the Great Lakes as a prime cause of water pollution may have been far too low.

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